

An analysis of Virginia Woolf's Novel Orlando: Feminism and Gender Perspective

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Abstract

The goal of this essay was to examine the novel Orlando's feminist viewpoints and also examines how gender is portrayed in this book. Portraying Orlando as an androgynous and bisexual character, Woolf challenges the conventional understanding of gender as two distinct categories. Because of its usage of gender depiction, Orlando has generated a lot of debate among feminist critics. This essay focusses on a significant component of a person's identity based on one's gender. In the framework of feminist research, gender matters regardless of whether the characters are male or female. Although gender is taken into account in culture, it also creates its own identity in any literary work. One of the authors who has been discussed the most in relation to feminist critical ideas is Virginia Woolf. By referencing the well-known essays Woolf's Feminism and Feminism's Woolf, the current study explores Woolf's commitment to feminism. The modern facets of feminist critical theories are also poignantly highlighted in this work. It centres on Virginia Woolf's use of the concept of time in the book. It examines androgyny while examining Orlando's personality.

KEYWORDS: Feminist, Gender, Literature, Orlando, Androgynous etc.

INTRODUCTION

Woolf's writings can be examined from a variety of angles. Caughie examines this in Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism (1991). The connections between contemporary theories of language and narrative and Woolf's textual experiments. Her writings challenge the connections between feminism, postmodernism, and modernism in narrative discourse. She observes, —In Orlando, androgyny, transsexualism, and transvestism bring into question not just conventional beliefs about sexuality but, more importantly, traditional conceptions about language itself (Caughie, 1991, p. 79). Marcus refers to androgyny and androgyny as the two terms which are most completely treated in Woolf's works, and she remarks, —A Room of One's Own is viewed by many critics to contain and repress women's wrath in favor of a more calm gender-transcendent or androgynous creativity (Marcus, 2006, p. 229). By using Butler's concept of gender performativity to Woolf's chosen novel, Orlando (1992), the researcher is motivated to begin the current work by Woolf's use of androgyny and her inventiveness in narrative technique as a contemporary writer. Woolf asserts that we can only realise our greatest potential as human beings by utilising both the feminine and masculine aspects of our minds. According to her, androgyny is the blending of masculine and feminine traits and establishing equilibrium between them (Moslehi, M. & Niazi, N.).

The narrative of a man named Orlando is told in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. The story takes place between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, when Midway through the book, Orlando changes his sex and develops. In addition to recognising the commonalities between men and women despite their disparate social responsibilities and attire, changing the sex is essential to the character development of the individual. Woolf reinforces Orlando's androgyny and bisexuality by highlighting the difference between his or her appearance and essence through the use of cross dressing and sex change.

This study focusses on how Woolf portrays androgynous characters in *Orlando* in order to undermine the solid categories of man and woman. Characters like these take gender roles which are not biological or natural, but rather social creations. Orlando's gender and sex transition produces an uncertain gender identity whose traits go against the expectations of mandatory heterosexuality.

Orlando by Virginia Woolf is a seminal work in the field of feminist critical ideas. Her writing skilfully addresses critical thinking and modernity. *Orlando* thought to be the gender reorientation of the characters in literature. Virginia Woolf adapted the text's plot from actual occurrences. It appears to be honest history of concerns pertaining to gender. Sandra Gilbert claims that "Woolf's *Orlando* is a fantastic yet truthful literary work" (Gilbert, P.XXV). Virginia Woolf has effectively and symbolically employed the idea of time. Orlando, the main character, endures for generations. In addition to recounting a person's life, Woolf also references British history to illustrate how shifting times have affected people over a longer period of time.

DISCUSSION

The novel's main element is the contentious idea of gender; Woolf permits her protagonist to change from male to female halfway through the 16th-century setting. In order to escape his clinging lover, Orlando flees to Turkey, where he works as ambassador. As a woman, she stays there for a while with a gipsy community before returning to England, where she gradually comes to terms with her female identity. After arriving in the area of Queen Victoria, she marries and has a child. Virginia Woolf portrays Orlando as being quite normal both as a man and as a woman, living through centuries and encountering some unusual characters.

Orlando, as Androgynous Characters

We will start by talking about how Woolf fictitiously portrayed feminist ideas in *Orlando*. In her essay *A Room of One's Own*, she focusses on the idea of androgyny. *Orlando* is revealed to be androgynous. It also discusses how androgyny challenges the division of gender in to the binary opposition of male and female. It has something to do with the idea of gender as performance. Orlando's relationships, which shape his gender identification, exhibit ambiguity. Woolf portrays gender as performance and discusses its superficial structure. A novel discusses shifts from one gender to the other. It signifies the instability of the categories of male and female. It explores the true change from male to female. In the theoretical frame work of feminist criticism. The concept of absolute and inherent gender identity is called into question by the phenomenon of gender change. Following this conversation, the narrative concentrates on Woolf's use of comedy and satire of gender stereotypes. The book is satire on conventional gender roles.

Many people consider Virginia Woolf to be one of the first feminist authors. Her theoretical and fictional works are consistently praised. In terms of feminist theory, her essay *A Room of One's Own* is her most notable. Within the framework of Woolf's contribution, Laura Marcus contends that her portrayal of symbiotic character reveals a connection between Virginia Woolf and feminism. The fact that Woolf's

writings are both theoretical and fictional, focussing on women's lives and histories, changed how people viewed and responded to her as a writer, Laura continues (Marcus, 2009).

According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary, androgyny is defined as having both male and female character; looking neither strongly male nor strongly female. In the case of Orlando, it becomes difficult to separate male and female in two independent genders; additionally, it challenges the established norms of gender. Woolf is successful in creating a truly androgynous character without one gender dominating the other. By depicting a feminine or masculine type androgyny, she reinforces the binary oppositions of male and female.

In the context of *A Room of One's Own*, Orlando is referred to be the embodiment of the ideal androgynistic position. It suggests someone who is well-versed in the secrets of both sexes and has access to the full range of human experience. It permits full use of the creative and intellectual faculties. This situation of Androgyny favours the best of both worlds, as the novel's lines "nor can there be any doubt that she reaped a twofold harvest by this device; the pleasures of life were increased and its experiences multiplied" (Orlando, p153) aptly illustrate. Orlando has an androgynous personality, according to the narrator, who claims that it was combining her male and female traits, one of which was dominant and the other gave her behaviour an unexpected turn (Orlando, p.133).

In this work, the topic of gender equity is most successfully addressed. Both genders are equally represented in Orlando. Her portrayal of both masculinity and femininity is examined in a fair manner. Critics of feminism contend that Orlando's awareness of both genders maintains a tight division between her male and female sides. They never behave simultaneously or merge in with one another. Orlando does not fully embody the ideal state of androgyny as a woman. Orlando inherits the habit of handling every issue under certain conditions. An incident in the book occurs when Orlando dresses like a guy and encounters Nell, as previously indicated. She decodes As a recent woman, Virginia Woolf portrays herself as suspecting that the girl's hesitancy was a way for her to satisfy her masculinity. Orlando, 150.

Orlando uses clothing to perform gender, signifying issues pertaining to gender inequalities. Costumes and disguises represent a presentation of the world's conventional meaning. Virginia Woolf uses disguises and costumes to explore the issue of identity. It displays gender performance. In Judith's words Butler, it exposes how arbitrary and constrained gender categorised.

CONCLUSION

By portraying Orlando as a bisexual and androgynous character who lives for more than 300 years during which his or her gender develops, Woolf critiques heterosexual society in the book. His or her lengthy life duration provides a backdrop against which the evolution of their sexual identity throughout time is described. Orlando learns that the distinctions between men and women are socially defined and built after experiencing the benefits and drawbacks of both sexes at every age. He or she makes an effort to get beyond the prevalent notion that the divisions between men and women are inherent. Woolf demonstrates how clothing is a sign of how gender is socially constructed, and she parodies the norm of clothing as a representation of gender ideality by using cross dressing to defy this convention. She declares that everyone has the capacity of both sexes and that clothing is merely an appearance.

In Orlando effectively conveys each gender's willingness for identity and independence. The two main topics of gender construction and male and female conventions are also covered.

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